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ABSTRACT

In this paper, a professor discusses how he uses his college-level courses in children's literature as a vehicle through which the significance of selective tradition can be made apparent. Selected tradition is defined as an intentionally selected version of the past or present that is powerfully operative in the process of social and cultural identification. The primary teaching method is to have college students read children's books and discuss them in light of their own experience and in reference to additional information contained in articles or presented in lectures. To discuss sexism or racial stereotyping, the professor usually begins by having students read a book that is obviously and blatantly stereotyped such as Hogan's "Nicodemas and the Little Black Pig." Students then move on to study the pervasiveness of the stereotypes of the other books they have read and discuss the importance of balancing the reading of sexist material. Another effective strategy is to compare two books written about a similar subject, setting, and theme. For example, Forbes' "Johnny Tremain" depicts the American Revolution as an epic struggle pitting the forces of progress and virtue against those of evil tyranny and reaction. The fact that the struggle for liberty and freedom occurred at the very time that slavery was being institutionalized in many colonies is never mentioned in this book. In contrast Edwards' "When the World's On Fire" discusses the Revolutionary War from the point of view of a nine-year-old slave. Comparative reading of these books makes a deep impression on students, most of whom never thought to consider how a black person would have perceived the Revolutionary War. (Author/RM)

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SENSITIZING STUDENTS TO THE SELECTIVE TRADITION IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

by

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Paper presented at the
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Introduction

A year ago at this same forum I outlined what I perceived to be some of the contributions of critical or neo-Marxist discourse to educational theory and practice (Taxel, 1981). Looking back at that paper it is clear, and this will surely not come as a surprise to any of you, that it was heavily weighted toward the theoretical side of the theory/practice equation. In this regard, my paper can be said to mirror the primary thrust of other critically-oriented writers of the past ten or so years who focused their energies on the development of a theory, or theories, to challenge the accepted wisdom in both the curriculum field and the sociology of education that continued to rely on functionalist and positivistic theories and modes of research. The success or failure of this venture is not at issue here, although I think it undeniable that the works of Anyon (1981), Apple (1979), Bowles and Gintis (1976), Bernstein (1977), Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) and Willis, (1977) to name just a few, have had a significant impact on educational theorizing and discourse. What is less certain is the impact which critical scholarship has had on classroom practice. Although writing scholarly papers for academic journals and symposia is important--both for the health of the field and for our personal professional advancement--the translation of theoretical constructs into a pedagogy suitable for teaching in places like Athens, Georgia; Newark, New Jersey; Salt Lake City, Utah; College Park, Maryland and Toronto, Canada, is another matter entirely and is perhaps an even greater challenge. It is to this last issue, that is, to my ongoing and often frustrating attempts to translate critical theories of the curriculum and schooling into a viable classroom praxis, that the remainder of this paper is devoted.

Before beginning this discussion, a brief sampling of some of the previous attempts to develop a radical pedagogy seems warranted. While not all of those to be discussed are critical or radical in the sense that they seek a basic transformation of the social order, they do represent a significant departure

from traditional teaching methods and assumptions. They therefore should be viewed as an important source of guidance and precedent for those seeking to develop a transformative pedagogy.

Previous Attempts to Develop a Radical Pedagogy

Efforts to develop a radical pedagogy can be viewed in several ways. One is to consider the age level of the children to whom the teaching prescriptions are directed. Many writers have been concerned with the development of teaching strategies appropriate for public school-aged children. A good example is Gross and Gross's (1969) useful collection of articles that is representative of the recent cycle of attempts at "radical school reform." The volume is noteworthy for the variety of its content as well as for the absence of a theoretical framework, a limitation that does not in my judgement lessen the volume's importance. A. S. Neill's (1960) widely read "radical approach to child rearing" outlines the methods he used at his school in Summerhill, England and is radical more for the psychological underpinnings of his method than for any expressed connection to political ideas or ideology. Wolf-Wasserman and Hutchinson (1978) offer a lengthy collection of lessons and strategies which is directed both toward public school-aged children and those at the college level.

Two significant collections of essays directed primarily at college and university level teachers include the "dissenting essays in the teaching of English" edited by Kampf and Lauter (1970) and Norton and Ollman's (1978) more recent sampling of "studies in socialist pedagogy." Finally there is Ira Shor's (1980) insightful account of his attempt to develop a pedagogy suitable for the largely working-class students who entered the University of New York under the Open Admissions program. Shor's work is noteworthy not only for his passionate commitment to those he teaches but also because he begins from a framework quite similar to that shared by those on this symposium.

Another way to conceive of these works is to consider whether they emphasize the processes of schooling or the content of the curriculum. Many writers (i.e., Dennison, 1969; Goodman, 1969; Kohl, 1969; Kozol, 1972) focused on classroom interactions and processes in advocating a more open education and sought alternatives to the authoritarianism implicit in traditional models.[1] Here the emphasis was on the need to develop inner freedom and autonomy as the prerequisite to the establishment of emotional and instinctive health. Elshtain (1978), however, was harshly critical of these "pop-psych", "theraputic" approaches and argued that "the determination of the critical thrust of a course must be posed and answered with reference to content, not form" (p. 299). Insistence on the potentially liberatory role of content is evident in the previously mentioned volume edited by Wolf-Wasserman and Hutchinson (1978), as well as in the many works published by the Council on Interracial Books for Children (1976, 1977) who have struggled to heighten awareness and sensitivity to race and sex-role stereotyping.

A middle-ground position, between those who emphasize content and those who focus on process, is offered by Giroux and Penna (1977). They urged that radical educators eschew the dicotomization of content and structure and "construct a paradigm that acknowledges the reciprocal and dialectical interaction of content and structure in the development of consciousness and character formation of both teachers and students." Shor's (1980) aforementioned work draws upon Paulo Freire's (1973, 1978) "diologic" method in his articulation of a pedagogy in which the "practice of freedom" (process) is developed through the study of "oppression" (p. 95) content. The final effort to develop a framework for a radical pedagogy to be mentioned in this admittedly cursory overview of previous writings is Elizabeth Cagan's (1978) brilliant and unfortunately little-discussed article entitled, "Individualism, Collectivism, and Radical Educational Reform." Cagan suggested that a key reason for the failure of a radical school reform is that the decidedly American notion of individualism lies at the heart of most

of the abortive attempts at radical school reform. Cagan--whose comments are directed primarily toward those teaching school-aged children--urged the active fostering of a "collectivist" character and offered a series of activities and methods designed to promote such ideals.[2]

The books and articles discussed above are useful in several respects. First, they constitute a set of precedents that those of us currently struggling to develop alternative teaching forms can draw on. Awareness of such efforts is a crucial fund of knowledge that will hopefully enable us, to paraphrase Michael Apple (1979), to "stand upon each other's political shoulders" (p. viii). These prior attempts to develop an emancipatory pedagogy also constitute an important link to a community of similarly minded individuals for those, like myself, who work in settings that lack such a community. The feelings of isolation, and aloneness, of being the only one (or one of a precious few) who views our present condition as requiring radical change are disconcerting and threatening, to say the least. While there is no substitute for developing local communities of individuals resolved to work together to define problems and work toward their solution, the knowledge that like-minded colleagues face similar struggles and are experiencing at least a modicum of success in their efforts, provides an important measure of comfort and solace. Before I outline some of the specifics of what I seek to do in my teaching, a few words about the setting in which I work and the prevailing climate of opinion is necessary. Ira Shor (1980) recognized the vital importance of assessing both the limitations and possibilitites of each situation when he stated that:

> In each school or college, teachers need to assess what level of liberatory learning they can assert, given student consciousness and institutional politics. Mass alienation and bureaucratic repression set limits on all phases of critical pedagogy. Caught in the middle, the teacher needs to remember that liberatory learning is not a professional conspiracy, but is rather a mutual effort of teacher and students (p. 113).

The Setting

Located in a university town approximately ninety miles from Atlanta, the University of Georgia is considered the "capstone" institution in a rapidly growing state university system. Within the past few decades, the state legislature undertook a major commitment to transform the university into an institution devoted not only to teaching and service, but also to research. This last point is reflected in a tremendous infusion of outside funding, the fact that new faculty are being recruited from the major public and private universities and the fact that Georgia is now very much a place where "publish or perish" is a way of life.

I work in the Department of Language Education, an autonomous department in the huge College of Education. My colleagues, the majority of whom are not from the south, are without exception bright, open-minded, productive (in research, publication, editorial involvement with national journals etc.) and thoroughly committed to the students they teach. In fact the commitment to teaching, particularly undergraduate teaching, exceeds that of any institution I am familiar with. In many other places, including the institution where I did my graduate work, one sure sign of "success" is the distance one puts between themselves and undergraduates. In my department we all have at least some contact with undergraduates and the public schools. In fact, I do not think I exaggerate when I say that as a department devoted to teaching teachers and training researchers in English and foreign language education, ours is without equal anywhere. I base this statement on what others, from others places, have told me and as one who was essentially ignorant of this fact before I arrived.

While I remain to this day unsure of whether or not my colleagues knew what they were "getting" when they hired me, there is no doubt they presently know. In several presentations to our bi-monthly faculty-student seminars, my views have been carefully and explicitly made known. These presentations have

been greeted with interest, open-mindedness and some occasional skepticism. Further, there has not been the slightest hint or suggestion that my perspectives and ideas were inappropriate and in need of change. In fact I like to think that my presence in the department has had, for lack of a better term, a "liberalizing" effect on it in the sense that issues and factors that were rarely mentioned when I arrived are often discussed in our numerous social and business gatherings.[3] In short, I have been, in every respect, encouraged to pursue my interests and have received College of Education funding to pursue a new research project.

The Students

The students I teach are overwhelmingly young, white women from Georgia. In two and one half years I have had but a single undergraduate and two graduate students who are male. The minority students I have had in my classes in this period number less than ten. The fact that women so overwhelmingly dominate our program is viewed as a function of two important factors. The first is economic: Georgia has one of the nation's lowest salary scales for teachers. The other factor is cultural. In Georgia--and I assume in much of the south--teaching is quite simply perceived as "woman's work."

Most of the undergrads are devoutly religious, a majority belong to sororities and few appear to have had exposure to ideas that challenge the world view that they brought to college. Resistance to ideas that challenge their belief systems is considerable. This week in my undergraduate survey of children's literature, for example, we examined the issue of sex role stereotyping in literature. Consideration of this issue has been central to my organization of the course. I have sought to make stereotyping (racial as well as sexual) a factor we address as we survey the various genre's and not something we do in only one or two classes. (However, I do devote several sessions to that topic in and of itself.) My intent here is to avoid the unfortunately common practice found in many public schools where a week is spent discussing

"black history" and then the subject is essentially ignored the rest of the year.

I shall have more to say about the specifics of what I seek to do below. The point in need of emphasis here is the resistence my students manifest when dealing with women's issues. Many students openly express a desire to lead the life of a Cinderella and Snow White: to be swept away by a handsome prince and retired to a life of domesticity. As this discussion inevitably leads to mention of the Equal Rights Amendment, it is striking that opposition to the Amendment is almost universal (and many of the reasons students give for their opposition would even make Phyllis Schlafly blush). My students are clearly threatened by talk of women's rights which they feel challenges the life to which they aspire. While I am careful to note that neither E.R.A., or the need for bias-free materials, are, in fact, a threat to those who wish to marry and have families, it appears that the very mention of the issues triggers a set of defensive mechanisms that are difficult to break down. I should note that students are generally more receptive to discussions of racial stereotyping, although many insist that even so grotesquely a stereotyped book as Hogan's (1934), Nicodemus and the Little Black Pig is the way many of the blacks they know "really are."

Graduate students are generally far more receptive to these matters, a fact that I see as a function of greater age and experiences that in many cases, included the unhappy dissolution of a marriage.[4] Nevertheless, most graduate students (and there are important differences between master's and doctoral level students in this regard) are still disturbingly limited in their exposure to ideas that challenge traditional values and beliefs. For one who would like to take issues and sexism as a starting point to delve into questions of class, capitalism and oppression, these factors can at times appear to be insurmountable.

A final point about the students I teach is necessary. Despite their often disturbing close-mindedness--and there are certainly exceptions--the overwhelming majority are compassionate, considerate and genuinely desire to serve the children they plan to teach. This last concern--and the fact that most are student teachers or in the case of graduate students, practicing teachers--makes them oriented toward the "What Will I do on Monday Syndrome?" that has frustrated other attempts to develop more reflective teachers (i.e., Zeichner, 1979). It must be stated that my students are very much a product of a system of education that discourages critical, analytic thought and a mass-culture characterized by what Williams (1961, 1976, 1977) termed a "selective tradition." Because the concept of a selective tradition is central to my attempts to raise student consciousness, it is appropriate that I briefly define the meaning of the term before I present some of my specific teaching methods.

The Selective Tradition

Williams (1961) suggested that the knowledge taught in schools constitutes "an active shaping to particular social ends" (p. 145). This active shaping was said to both reflect the wider society and contribute to its ongoing reproduction by creating and lending support to an effective, dominant and "hegemonic" culture. This hegemonic culture consists of a pervasive set of meanings that saturates the consciousness of a society to the extent that it defines the very reality and essence of social experience (Williams, 1976, pp. 204-205).

The central "mechanism" of this effective and dominant culture is the "selective tradition" which is defined by Williams (1977) as "an intentionally selective version of a shaping past and a pre-shaped present," that is "powerfully operative in the process of social and cultural identification" (p. 115). In simpler terms, Williams argued that given the expanse of human history and

culture, only certain historical and cultural traditions and meanings are kept alive and transmitted. Thus, our history textbooks, movies, and television programs have been dominated by the perspectives of white, Anglo, middle and upper-class males. This is not to suggest that the history and culture of, for example, women, minority groups and individuals from the working class are totally excluded, although this essentially was the case until comparatively recently. Rather, it is intended to indicate that, for example, children's literature and social studies texts have historically minimized, distorted, and, in many instances, altogether excluded the history and culture of women, minorities and the working class, facts that have been rather conclusively documented by a wide variety of content analyses of these materials.[5]

The crucial point about selective traditions is that they are presented, not as a partial or limited account of the past, but as "the tradition, the significant past." Such traditions become part of a diffuse and widely accepted sense of tradition, culture, and history and provide an important link to and ratification of the present that serves the interests of those who hold power and influence in society. As Williams (1977) put it, the tradition offers "a sense of predisposed continuity...which offers historical and cultural ratification of a contemporary order" (pp. 115-16). Thus, to use the example of black Americans, their historic minimalization, distortion and outright slander in curricular materials is both a reflection (albeit an often distorted one) and a cause of their relative powerlessness in society. That is, when groups like blacks are either invisible from American history and literature, or are presented in a distorted fashion (i.e., the stereotypic image of the happy slave), their present powerlessness appears to be consistent with the natural order of things. The galvanizing effect of the television dramatization of Alex Haley's Roots can perhaps best be explained by the fact that it conflicted so dramatically with the generally accepted conception of the slave experience,

(i.e., the one contained in Gone With the Wind[6]).

Notes on Process

Certain courses, by the very nature of their content, lend themselves to critical teaching. Courses in political theory or economics naturally lend themselves to, for example, discussions of Marxist political and economic theories. In contrast, it is far more difficult to infuse critical perspectives into language arts courses where one is responsible to instruct teachers in how to teach children how to write and spell. While certain aspects of the language arts courses I teach do provide opportunities for critical discussion (i.e., the terribly important issue of dialect differences and the ways in which speakers of non-standard dialects are "penalized" by school systems that favor those who speak standard English), I have thus far found it quite difficult to do more than attempt to counter the mindless push to teach skills devoid of any meaningful and relevant content. I will, therefore, devote the remainder of my remarks to my efforts to use my courses in children's literature as the vehicle through which the significance of selective traditions can be made apparent.

One not-yet-discussed problem I encounter in teaching survey courses in children's literature is that students arrive expecting to receive guidance on how to choose "cute books" for kids. They expect, and I provide them with, the tools to judge the literary and artistic qualities of these books. This effort to sharpen their skills in literary analysis is however, supplemented by an attempt to make clear the importance of considering social and political factors in evaluating books that are suitable for children. It is important, however, that I make it clear that the constraints imposed both by student attitudes and the need to cover, in a single quarter, content that should really be presented in two or three quarters has, up until this point, limited the extent to which critical issues can be discussed.[7] Because of these limitations, I plan to teach a new course this spring entitled "Images

of Women and Minorities in Children's Literature," a course that will be devoted entirely to consideration of the ideological and political significance of selective traditions. More about this course will be said below. I should note, however, that this is a course designed primarily for doctoral students, the very group who tend to be most sensitive and aware of the issues under discussion. Thus, the students who most "need" that which will be covered in this new course, get small, and I fear, insufficient exposure to critical ideas.

While I am mindful of the vital importance of process, I concur with Elshtain's (1978) previously mentioned belief that "the critical thrust of a course must be posed and answered with reference to content, not form" (p. 229). I share her feeling that many humanistic and critically oriented teachers have been hesitant to demand that students read, write and reflect in a rigorous fashion. Consequently, I require that students do a lot of reading and write and reflect on what they read.

Although I am not adverse to using the lecture format when it is necessary to present material not available in written form, I concur with Shor's (1980) belief that an ultimate goal of liberatory learning is "for the teacher to be expendable." His call for the "withering away of the teacher" (p. 98) has much in common with the attitude of Wolf-Wasserman and Hutchinson (1978) who noted that:

> Power generates antagonism and interferes with learning and teaching, and that therefore one of the social-change teacher's first tasks is to find ways to dilute the power in the classroom with which she or he is invested by the state. This does <u>not</u> mean abandoning responsibility as an adult and teacher (pp. 11-12 emphasis in original).

For me this has meant making the classroom as informal and relaxed as possible, (i.e., first name basis, open door policy in my office, etc). We read as many texts in common as is possible (in the case of picture books,

they are read in class), and in the ensuing discussions I seek to limit my role to that of an asker of questions. When this works well, students themselves ask questions of each other, and my role is reduced to that of one of a group who is responding to a piece of literature. Sometimes, however, as in the previously mentioned instance where my class took a decidedly anti-feminist position and no class member opposed the vehemently anti-feminist stance of several members of the class, I find it necessary to at least present an opposing position. I have worked hard to avoid "coming in too strong" and staunchly advocating a position. To do so is to run the risk of alienating students, something I have learned from painful experience, although I have no doubt that my own position is generally quite clear.

Teaching About the Selective Tradition

My primary teaching method is to have students consider either individual or pairs of texts, and then to discuss them in light of their own experience and in reference to additional information contained in articles or presented in lecture. Below is the text of the picture storybook I use to begin our discussion of sexism.

> Guess what I'll do, said the little boy to his sister.
> When I'm grown up, I'll break rocks in half for you with my bare hands.
> I'll capture a wild black horse and tame him for you to ride.
> I'll climb mountains and bring you a stone from the top.
> I'll swim across oceans and bring you coral from the bottom of the sea.
> I will do all your arithmetic for you.
> I'll win the race in my Bugatti and take you for a ride a hundred miles an hour.
> I'll fight anyone you don't like and win.
> I'll build you a bridge that is bigger than any bridge in the world.
> And a castle to live in.
> And I'll pick the pinkest rose in the world for you to smell.
> Then I'll bring you a friend to keep you company, while I explore the world (Zolotow, 1964).

The sentiment of this book never fails to touch my students, especially

the undergraduates. It is beautifully illustrated and has the complimentary relationship between text and illustration that I stress as an important factor to consider when evaluating a picture storybook. Its sexism is, however, obvious to even the most resistant student, although they disagree about whether it is worth making an issue over. One could not in fact ask for a clearer delineation of the ways girls have been stereotyped in children's literature. We discuss specific aspects of the stereotypes contained in the selection, the boy engaged in a variety of exciting adventures while the girl, dressed in a lovely dress and a pink hat, passively watches (in one case the illustration shows her standing on a pedestal). We talk about the fact that the well-documented finding that girls, as a group, do poorly in math is something that is learned and not inherent to girls/women as a group. I finally appeal to their own desire for an interesting and exciting life by asking whether they would like to be left behind (even if in the company of a "male friend"), while their brother went off to explore the world.

Most students see the point, if often grudgingly, but wonder if kids think in terms of stereotypes. Here it is crucial to make two fundamental points. The first is that stereotypes, particularly with young children, do not register at the conscious level unless they are raised as an issue. Stereotypic attitudes are probably "imprinted" at an unconscious level and through repeated exposure--the second point--to many books, films, television shows, and of course, parental and peer group attitudes. We then consider the pervasiveness of the stereotypes in the books they have read and discuss the importance of balancing the reading of sexist materials (i.e., folk and fairy tales) with materials that show girls and women engaged in activities and roles traditionally forbidden to women (i.e., Fitzhugh, 1964; O'Dell, 1961; 1980; Paterson, 1978, 1979). The reading of the nonsexist materials is

especially important because it makes clear the fact that those characters engaged in non-stereotyped activities can do so and still be "girls."

I generally begin the discussion of racial stereotyping in a similar fashion; that is, by using a book that is obviously and blatantly stereotyped. Hogan's (1934) Nicodemas and the Little Black Pig is just such a book. Nicodemas, who "didn't like totin' wood and drawin' water and feedin' the creeters. . . got a big surprise when he discovered that a new litter of pigs includes a black one. Come here, little black pig" remarks the child--who is illustrated with highly stereotyped nose and mouth and eyes that almost pop out of their sockets when he is frightened--"you don't belong among all them white pigs. You is black like me and I 'spec you b'long to me."

Nicodemas is by both word and deed typical of the foolish, superstitious, and lazy black characters so prevalent in both literature, television and films prior to the 1960's. Later we meet his "aunty" who is illustrated in a style reminiscent of Aunt Jemima and speaks in an exaggerated style of speech that has long served to denigrate black characters ("Lan' sakes, Nicodemas, you sho is a long way from home. What's a matter, honey, is you lost?")

Most students easily recognize these stereotypes for what they are. While several students always claim that "they know many blacks like that," discussion usually leads to the conclusion that character, style, and illustration serve to paint a demeaning picture of blacks that would be "unhealthy" for children, both white and black. Examination of other books with similar stereotyping (i.e., Bannerman, N. D., Lofting, 1920) when compared to books that present unique multi-dimensional individuals who may, in fact, speak dialect (i.e., Clifton, 1973, 1973, 1977; Greenfield, 1974; Mathis, 1972) serve to make this point.

Another effective strategy is to compare two books written about a similar subject, setting and theme. Two novels about the American Revolution are

especially noteworthy in this regard. Forbes', Johnny Tremain (1944), undoubtedly the best known book about the American Revolution, depicts the Revolution as an epic struggle pitting the forces of progress and virtue against those of evil tyranny and reaction. It is waged so that "a man can stand up." Conspicuously absent from Johnny Tremain is any discussion of what one historian termed the "central paradox of American history," the fact that the struggle for liberty and freedom occurred at the very time that slavery was being institutionalized in many colonies. The issue is never addressed in Johnny Tremain because it contains no black characters, a characteristic this Newbery award winning book shares with virtually all of the other children's novels written about this important period of history (Taxel, 1981b).

In contrast, Sally Edwards', When the World's On Fire, (1973) is unique among the books on the subject in that it is told from the point-of-view of a nine-year-old slave, Annie McGee. The hypocracy of white revolutionists who fight for freedom and liberty, yet hold slaves, and the equally duplicitous British, who make promises they do not intend to keep, is laid bare by the unforgettable character, Aunt Maum.

> The Americans promise freedom, if only we will ride and fight with them in the swamps. The Americans babble about liberty--yet it is only their own liberty they dream of, not ours. And the British, the most civilized of men, promise freedom only to enslave the slaves. We lose either way (p. 101).

Comparative reading of these books makes a deep impression on students, most of whom never thought to consider how a black man or woman would have perceived the Revolution. This, of course, is precisely the point I seek to make and provides one of the most dramatic illustrations of the function and effect of the selective tradition.

Unfortunately, I am no longer able to have my entire class undertake this comparative reading as the Edwards book is at present, after but two printings,

out of print. Having checked the reviews of this book, it is clear that the reviewers failed to perceive the importance of its novel presentation of the Revolution. That fact, in conjunction with the novel's less than laudatory attitude toward the Revolution, probably accounts for the book's being discontinued. Clearly, selective traditions work in complicated ways and need not to be viewed as the product of conspiracies of evil minded men (and women).

A final, more difficult, and subtle comparative reading--and one that I have yet to attempt with undergraduates--involves the contrasting of two books that depict the efforts of a black family to confront the racist climate of the south during the depression. Mildred Taylor's, Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry (1976) is the Newbery award winning story of the Logan family's tenacious struggle to maintain their dignity and retain control of their land in an environment of racism and violence. The ugly, awful truth about their world slowly becomes apparent to the Logan children who had been sheltered from reality by their loving parents. Perhaps the most noteworthy character is that of David Logan, the proud father, who faces his tormentors with courage, steadfastness and a firm sense of how far a black man can go in defying the efforts of those who would destroy him. What emerges from this moving, beautifully-crafted story is a picture of a family united by their love, racial pride and a firm, yet realistic resolve to resist the dehumanizing hatred of those who would destroy them.

An equally loving black family's efforts to deal with racist oppression is found in Sebestyen's Words By Heart (1979), winner of the International Reading Association's Children's Book Award. The Sills family has moved to an all-white town in Texas in the hopes of attaining a better life. When racism rears its ugly head, the response of Ben Sills, the father, is to quote scripture and urge forgiveness of his enemies. In contrast to David Logan who

takes a firm stand against his oppressors, Ben responds with injunctions to "love thy neighbor" and "overcome good with evil." In the novel's dramatic closing, Ben, shot by a hateful white youth, sacrifices his own life in an effort to save that of his assailant. He then makes Lena--his daughter, and the novel's central character--vow not to make any effort to bring his murderer to justice. Lena, who is a dynamic, engaging character who desires to fulfill her considerable potential, agrees, thus completing her transformation to one who, like her father, uses scripture to justify passivity. As Sims (1980) points out, Sebestyen's use of the bible is quite similar to that taught by slave holders to their slaves and is a sharp contrast to the theology of Martin Luther King who found in the bible a rationale for decisive, if non-violent, action.

These books bring to the fore several important issues. First, the Sebestyn novel contains racial stereotypes of far greater subtlety than the grotesque caricatures found in books like Nicodemas. This stereotype is that of the noble black man who passively faces oppression and sacrifices his life so that a white can learn a lesson in racial toleration.[8] (It is, however, unclear whether Ben Sills' murderer "sees the light.")

Here it is important to discuss whether this admittedly noble idea of turning the other cheek and loving one's enemies has succeeded in reducing the climate of racial oppression in this country. The fact that it took the aggressive tactics of a Martin Luther King to begin the civil rights movement is an important point to make in this regard. The vehemence of the reaction of Sims (1980), and other blacks to Words By Heart, indicates that they take objection to the book's suggestion that hatred and violence be met with passivity, patience and acceptance.

In this context, we discuss the fact that fiction presents the reader with

a model of the past or present reality that contains an implicit model of social action.[9] In contrasting the actions taken by Ben Sills and David Logan in the face of similar threats, we are able to assess the nature of their responses as political statements to young readers. In other words, these books enjoin readers to take quite different stands in the face of injustice. One urges us to turn the other cheek and trust God to take care of things. The other states that we need to take a decisive stand, mindful of the possibilities and limitations of the situation. Finally, the fact that Taylor is a black woman and Sebestyn white, leads to a discussion whether whites can adequately depict the black experience. This issue is not merely addressed in reference to these two books but in light of the fact that other white attempts to portray the black experience seem, almost without exception, to fall back on tired, uni-dimensionally stereotyped characters.

Comparison of these two books has yielded dramatic results that far exceeded my expectations. Our actual discussion is preceeded by my asking the students to write a critical, comparative paper which integrates published reviews, both positive and negative (i.e., Sims, 1980). Having previously read books that dealt repeatedly in stereotypic images of blacks, students are genuinely moved by Taylor's semi-autobiographic account of the struggle of her family to retain their dignity and self-worth. The book is also a revelation to students who have precious little exposure to a perspective other than the white southerner's view of race relations.

The reading of books which embue minority group characters with depth and dimension is most effective when they can be scrutinized in reference to the stock, stereotyped characters that have for so long dominated children's literature.[10] Unfortunately, this necessitates more extensive reading than is possible within the confines of a course that requires coverage of other

issues and genres. This need to gain an historical perspective on how the images of women and minorities have evolved over time was a primary impetus to my development of the previously mentioned course entitled Images of Women and Minorities in Children's Literature. This course will not only extensively sample the literature itself, but will also directly consider theoretical writings about selective traditions (i.e., Williams), as well as work that has been concerned with the political and social functions of literature. A more direct approach will also be made to discovering the ideological significance of literary form, something I have heretofore only dealt with in reference to the Taylor-Sebestyn books. In short, I see this course as the vehicle through which a systematic critical approach to the study of literature can be undertaken. I find the prospect exciting, especially given the often frustrating, uneven nature of my efforts to present these issues to my other classes, particularly the undergraduates. My excitement in approaching this course is, however, somewhat diminished by my realization that the students who will take this course are an "elite" group (i.e., mainly doctoral students), many of whom already have the kind of sensitivity I seek to transmit to my undergraduates. Clearly, the real challenge is to develop more effective strategies to reach those students who are most resistant.

Conclusion

This paper began with reference to an address I made to the AERA Convention last year. I concluded that paper with the following statement:

> In closing, I must admit that what I have said here is not novel, let alone radical. To some it will sound like so much recycled liberal consciousness raising. This may well be true although I like to think my definition of the problems, and the solutions I present go beyond those offered by liberals. In any event, it is a beginning and we must begin somewhere, musn't we? (Taxel, 1981a, p. 24).

In all honesty I feel that this statement would be a valid conclusion

to this paper. My successes with the strategies outlined have been uneven but progress is steady. Many students emerge from my classes more aware of and sensitive to issues that previously did not concern them. While I am clearly not transforming these students into individuals ready to call for a radical change in the social order, I like to think that I have helped many of them look more critically at their own values and those we transmit to children. At a time when there appears to be a retreat from the gains made in the sixties, and growing acceptance of an attitude of selfish unconcern with the plight of the less fortunate, I think this not an inconsiderable accomplishment. This is not to suggest that I, or any of us, can rest in our laurels. Small successes do at least, however, allow us to have hope for more substantial successes in the future.

NOTES

(1) Bowles & Gintis' (1976) seminal effort to outline a Marxist political economy of education emphasized the correspondence between the authoritarian nature of the social relations of the classroom--the hidden curriculum--and the social relations of the workplace.

(2) Sapon-Shevin (1978) provides another useful source for cooperative instructional activities.

(3) I should also note that my colleagues have taught me at least as much as I them in some of the content areas I teach. In a state where competency based education is state mandated, many of them are engaged in a variety of activities (i.e., teaching, in-service, research and writing, state department work) in an effort to bring some reason and sanity to an idea that now seems likely to be adopted nation-wide.

(4) This factor not surprisingly makes these students far more receptive to discussion of sexism in literature and its important ideological functions.

(5) For a listing of some of these studies and a discussion of the question of the selective tradition in children's literature in general, and in regard to a specific sample of children's historical novels see Taxel (1981b). Elsewhere, (Taxel, 1978/79), I discussed some of the recent challenges to books deemed racist and or sexist.

(6) Another, recent example of a television program to challenge prevailing attitudes about the slave experience dramatized the life of Denmark Vesey, who led an unsuccessful slave revolt in 1822. It is interesting to note--and a commentary on how selective traditions work--that this powerful drama was buried on the Public Broadcasting System and not shown on the commercial network who otherwise seem to relish stories about those who struggle for freedom and liberty.

(7) I do not mean to suggest that a greater integration of critical thought and perspectives could not be included in these courses. This paper is simply a report of what I have thus far been able to do.

(8) Taylor's The Cay (1969) is another critically acclaimed book where a noble black makes such a supreme sacrifice. Other books containing more subtle shades of stereotyping include Fox's, The Slave Dancer (1973) and Armstrong's Sounder (1969).

(9) See Harold (1978), Kelly (1970) and Taxel (in press) for discussion of ways to analyze the model of social action contained in narrative fiction.

(10) Two books by Joyce Rockwood (1975, 1976), depict the Native American experience with respect, dignity and anthropological authenticity which is a refreshing contrast to stories about savage heathens.

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